





transportation was easier, so we didn't necessarily have that same sprawling feeling. I mean, living on a college campus, your community is kind of insular, right, you can get wherever you need to go on campus. I think I was culture shocked by how conservative the campus was, because I'd grown up—well, I had gone to high school in a very progressive area of St. Louis. That being said, over time, I began to realize that, while yes, being at SMU [Southern Methodist University], was a significantly more conservative college campus than I might have experienced if I had gone to, say, Washington University in St. Louis, being in St. Louis wasn't as progressive as I thought when I was in high school. I think a lot of it was performative progressivism or maybe being progressive to a certain extent, like, "I have progressive values, and I'm proud of being a Democrat, but I'm still gonna hoard wealth." Or, "I'm proud of my values, but I still want to keep my community majority White and wealthy." I think it was an initial culture shock of being in Dallas and realizing how conservative my new environment was. But over time, I realized that actually, maybe I hadn't been in as progressive a community as I had originally thought before that.



Rimsha Syed 07:04

Yeah, so hearing about how you've moved around so much throughout your childhood, I'm curious about how your experience within grade school was, or making friends as a very transient person, and all of those challenges that might come with moving a lot?



Jessica Pires-Jancose 07:26

That's a great question. I think that one thing I really appreciated about moving is that I got exposure to so many different people and was able to make friends who kind of reflected my values at many different points in my life. And I think today, that ability to move easily from place to place is still something that I really value. I'm not necessarily seeking a place where I can be for a long time. I love that freedom of movement. And I think I had really different—I would say, there was some culture shock in terms of moving especially from Kentucky to Massachusetts. When I was in elementary school in Louisville, Kentucky, I went to a Catholic school where I think it was me and one or two other students were the only non-White students in the elementary school. So I think there was some racism and experiences of being othered that I experienced when I was there that I didn't necessarily realize in the moment, because I was just a kid.



Jessica Pires-Jancose 08:51

But going from that environment that was very discipline-heavy, where every problem or quote-unquote "problem" or behavioral issue was met with a detention, and so I was frequently disciplined, because I was a pretty anti-authoritarian kid, I would say, which still holds true to me today. Going from that environment to going to a really progressive school in Boston, that gave students a ton of freedom throughout the day, was a huge culture shock. But in that respect, I'm really happy that my mom and I were transient and moved around, because if I had stayed in Kentucky, I wouldn't have known that there was a different way for a school system to operate. And moving to Boston, my school district was so much more diverse and

progressive. So I was able to meet kids and hang out with kids who looked like me, or who came from other cultures and ethnicities, and I got to learn more about other ways of living, which was really amazing. So I'm really grateful that I was able to move around a lot.



Rimsha Syed 10:06

Yeah, thanks for answering that. And going back to what you said earlier, I was wondering if you could elaborate on some of the more conservative things that you experienced at SMU?



Jessica Pires-Jancose 10:21

Oh man, I mean, I think the thing that first struck me when I came to campus was the different life experiences that so many SMU students had had compared to experiences that I had had and thought were normal. It felt like every person I met had been to boarding school, every person I met was already aiming for a certain sorority or fraternity. And as a non-White student on campus, the initial feeling you're hit with is invisibility. People just don't notice that you're there. And I think that was shocking, to feel like I wasn't seen by other students around me, or that I just didn't matter as much. That was tough. But eventually, I joined a multicultural sorority, and so I found my community at SMU a lot more, I would say, between my multicultural sorority and my scholarship group. But even interacting within that community, you can't escape the larger waters that you're swimming in.



Jessica Pires-Jancose 11:58

So I remember certain moments that were really shocking were after Trump was elected my sophomore year, I remember one of the fraternities hung up, a "Make America Great Again" banner the next day. And just really terrible things happened. I remember one person in my sorority wore a Mexico jersey the next day, and they were spit at on campus. We had a multicultural Greek house on campus, and we hung up this banner that said, "We're gonna be all right," and in the middle of the night, someone came by and tore it down and shredded it. So there were experiences like that, too. And I remember actually that same week that Trump was elected, it happened to fall on this rally against sexual assault. And I remember we were having a rally through campus, and we walked by the row of fraternity houses. I remember so many fraternity members came out of the houses and drove by us, and they assumed it was an anti-Trump rally. And so they were honking at us and shouting, "Trump 2020," whatever the next election year was, I forget. And so it was a really hostile environment at times, and other times, you just felt that it was beneath the surface.



Rimsha Syed 13:47

Yeah, thanks for sharing that. This really takes me back to some experiences that I had at UT as well, also a pretty conservative campus, and things happened here and there. But I wanted to ask, do you see yourself living in Dallas long-term, or I know that you mentioned that you really enjoy moving around a lot, so did you have a specific place in mind that you wanted to move to down the line?

 Jessica Pires-Jancose 14:20

I feel like I want to live everywhere. I would love to live in New York. I would love to live in New Mexico at some point. Pacific Northwest sounds amazing. I would love to live in Latin America. I think my time in Dallas and in Texas generally has really changed my opinions of Texas. Before moving here full time, I felt like, "Oh, Texas is so sprawling. There's no sense of community." And my time as a student and definitely as a community organizer has taught me that that is not true at all. And especially when we're talking about organizing around progressive issues like abortion access, there is such a tight-knit community of activists and communities who are providing mutual aid to each other in the absence of state support and state intervention. And yeah, this sense of Texan pride and Texan community is so, so strong in the state. And so I think whenever I do move away, it won't be out of this sense—I think a lot of people who are not from Texas are like, "Oh, you just need to move away, because it's so conservative." And my feeling is, no, Texas is more progressive than anyone gives us credit for. And I think when I do move away, it won't be out of a sense of, "I need to leave Texas," it's more out of a sense of, "I would love to experience other parts of the world and other ways of being, but I would also love to come back to Texas at some point." I think definitely a part of my heart lives here.

 Rimsha Syed 16:14

Yeah, I think I definitely agree with you. There are so many great organizers and movements here in Texas, and you can always find that community, but they are so under-represented, which, I think part of the reason why we're doing this Voices of Change collection in the first place is to highlight all of the great aspects of Texas that are just not talked about enough.

 Jessica Pires-Jancose 16:38

Yes, definitely.

 Rimsha Syed 16:40

Yeah. So I also wanted to hear more about your cultural identity. Do you speak any other languages? What sort of traditions did your family have growing up and all of that?

 Jessica Pires-Jancose 16:54

So my mom immigrated from India when she was in college. So she came to the US for graduate school, and that's where she met my father. And my dad's family is, in his generation, from Indiana, and I think in his grandparents generation had immigrated here from Poland and the Czech Republic. So growing up, I would say, it was a mix between very White American culture with my dad and stepmom and younger sibling, and then a form of, I would say, immigrant culture with my mom. My mom, I think, when she was growing up in India has described herself to me as a little bit of a black sheep. She has always had very progressive values that put her at odds with a lot of the more traditional cultural expectations of the



















Jessica Pires-Jancose 4t:pt

Two of my biggest role models and guiding stars in my work are "drienne aree Brown, who's the author of *Pleasure Activism* and *Emergent Strategy*, just a badass, amazing movement organizer, whose work literally has changed my life. I think about *Pleasure Activism* on a daily basis. And definitely a lot of what I was saying earlier, around wanting to orient my organizing work around pleasure and around community building is a hundred percent "drienne aree Brown and her teachings. And another movement leader who I really, really admire is Tricia Hersey who's the founder of The Nap Ministry, which is essentially a movement that teaches that rest is resistance. And both of their teachings around rest as a radical practice and an active practice and organizing as something that should bring us joy have really changed my life and my organizing work.



Rimsha Syed 46:1b

Yeah. So one thing I like asking in these interviews is, what do you find healing? Obviously, seeing challenges throughout your day-to-day, or feeling people's pain, what do you do when things get overwhelming?



Jessica Pires-Jancose 46:7t

I find time off to be incredibly healing. In my ideal world, I would not be working. I mean, obviously, you have to work to a certain extent to keep yourself alive. Meaning preparing food is work, going grocery shopping is working. But in my ideal world, I would not be working to live. And so when I have time off, whether that's at the end of my work day, on weekends, when I'm able to take a larger break, I find that to be really healing, because burnout in advocacy culture is real. It's really intense. And honestly, I think all of us are really burnt out from life under capitalism. And we don't get enough time to rest. We don't get enough time to step away from it. And I think something that I've learned from The Nap Ministry is that process of grieving the life that we could have had without capitalism, and resting from that is a lifelong process. But I find I feel the most rested when I can just take time off and not have to think about work, not have to think about bills. And I can just zone out and tap into another world through maybe a show or book or a game.



Rimsha Syed 48:1:

Yeah, couldn't agree more. So this might have been something you've briefly touched on already, but what are some of the biggest challenges in this work?



Jessica Pires-Jancose 48:::

I mean, there are the obvious challengers like lawmakers and anti-abortion advocates who are staunchly anti-abortion and who introduce legislation like the death penalty for seeking abortion, or bans like SB8. And then there are also the challenges, like quote-unquote,

"progressive" or "Democratic" lawmakers who don't act to protect abortion, and who won't even say the word abortion. That is really the biggest challenge that we have, because obviously, we're not going to move the needle on people who are staunchly anti-abortion extremists. But we can move the needle on people who maybe just need education on how to actually talk about abortion, or on how to actually just use the word abortion. But that is a huge challenge, is Democrats and progressive candidates and elected officials not wanting to be bold in their support of abortion access, because they think it's going to put them at risk of not getting re-elected. When in reality, as I mentioned before, the majority of Texans support access to safe and legal abortion. That is a huge challenge.

 Jessica Pires-Jancose 48:26

And even outdated tactics within the reproductive rights organization are a huge challenge. There's definitely a lot of racism within the movement. I mean, the reproductive rights movement as a whole is largely founded by White women, and throughout its history has actively excluded Black and indigenous and other women and organizers of color. That's a challenge within the movement. Organizations who refuse to use gender inclusive language is a challenge. So you'll see a lot of organizations that still cling to very woman-centered language, when in reality, we know that all people need access to abortion and reproductive health care. So that includes trans people, that includes non-binary people. And it's not hard to make a shift to gender neutral language. So when you see reproductive rights and advocacy and health organizations still using women-only-centered language, that is an active choice that they're making, to actively exclude trans and non-binary people from their language. So there are challenges from the outside, but there are plenty of challenges within the inside of the movement, too.

 Rimsha Syed 51:02

Thanks for sharing that. And I did want to say thank you for your labor. I have one more question today. It's a bit more open-ended, but seeing as this oral history interview will be archived, and hopefully people will be listening to it several years down the line, maybe people have changed by then, maybe they won't. We can always hope. But do you have any advice or any words of wisdom to share to people, especially as someone who's so entrenched within this movement, and broadly, someone who has experience in community building?

 Jessica Pires-Jancose 51:42

Hmm, my biggest piece of advice is set your boundaries. Set and respect your boundaries in the work that you're doing. You don't owe anybody this work. I think, especially if you're doing organizing and movement building work, I cannot stress enough how important it is that you stay fresh and refreshed and healthy in order to do this work. The world does not benefit when you are running yourself ragged, or when you feel like you have nothing else to give. Your health and your well-being are so important, and you can rest in the knowledge that this movement is

sustained by many. No successful movement is one person alone. And so when you take time to rest, trust that other people are continuing this work in your absence while you're resting. No one movement is entirely on your shoulders.

 Jessica Pires-Jancose 52:55

And I just would love to encourage people, one of the biggest lessons I've learned from adrienne maree brown in *Pleasure Activism* is that organizing is science fiction work. We're creating new possibilities for new futures that don't even exist yet. And so as much as possible in your organizing, tap into your imagination, tap into your sense of joy and radical wonder, almost this childlike wonder of the world around you, and imagining what it could look like, and what you hope for it to look like. And just know that, yeah, our work is the work of generations. So you might not see that in your lifetime, but we're doing this work so that our ancestors can enjoy it. And we're doing this work so that the people who came before us can see what we're doing, and the changes that we've made, and hopefully find peace where they are to.

 Rimsha Syed 53:53

Yeah, that was beautifully said, thank you so much for your time today, Jessica.

 Jessica Pires-Jancose 53:58

Of course. Thank you for asking me to be a part of this.

 Rimsha Syed 54:01

Of course. I will go ahead and stop the recording now.

 Jessica Pires-Jancose 54:04

Okay.